Teacher leadership is not a new idea. It has become popular in waves over the last century, and has been used primarily to make change in schools on a grassroots level. Though teacher leaders rarely gain degrees in this field of work or accept formal positions as teacher leaders, they acquire knowledge, skills, insights, and strategies that help change, shape, and mold their current school environments. Additionally, teacher leader positions, while normally informal, offer greater potential for influence than a normal classroom teacher may have or can offer to their colleagues.

The purpose of this study was to examine charter school teachers, enrolled in a teacher leadership development program, as they experienced their own leadership development and the early practice of their leadership. These educators learned leadership simultaneously in a two-fold manner: (a) in the form of attending classes in a teacher leadership development course,
and (b) in the form of exercising their leadership duties, as learned from their course and then practiced within their school.

This phenomenological study examined the actual, lived experiences of seven teacher leaders who went through a year-long course of study and practice. By exploring their experiences of leadership training and practice, this study sheds light on the ways teachers draw upon their learning and practice of their own leadership. The knowledge of this phenomena may help schools, districts, universities, and aspiring teacher leaders to better understand the experiences teacher leaders face as they grow into their new roles and can better support and plan for their success as teacher leaders.

A conceptual framework for understanding the process of how teacher leaders experience becoming leaders can be divided into three parts: (a) the teacher leader, (b) the teacher learning by studying, and (c) the teacher learning by doing. Several factors were identified within each category, providing a coding scheme to analyze the data. Two individual interviews were scheduled with a sampling of seven teacher leader candidates. The first interview was given close to the beginning of their time in the leadership course. The second interview was conducted near the end of the course. Each teacher leader program participant also kept a journal of their learning throughout the course. Journals were collected and analyzed. A final focus group interview was organized after the program was over. This interview was strictly for member-checking the analyzed data. Descriptive statistics and direct quotes from the participants were used to demonstrate key findings.

The findings reveal eleven major themes of influence as teachers become teacher leaders. One theme is in the teacher leader category, five themes are within the learning by studying category, and five themes are within the learning by doing category. There were several findings for this study in regards to these themes individually, as well as their inter-relatedness to universal teacher leadership preparation and practices. Several recommendations for future practice and programming concluded this study in hopes that these findings may be useful to future development of teacher leadership.